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ABSTRACT

Learning can occur in a natural way when parents serve as models to their child, demonstrating how to learn, facilitating the learning process, and guiding the learner. With a teacher's guidance, parents can improve their understanding of their child's learning. Teachers can encourage parents to share wordless picture books, books with predictable text, poetry, and environmental print with their children. Teachers can also offer parents such ideas as establishing writing areas in the home, providing topics to stimulate writing, and establishing an attitude that encourages writing. Teachers can help parents develop a child's oral language skills by encouraging the parents to use puppets; share words and motions by means of fingerplays and songs; compose a weekly newsletter; promote communication in the car; and limit television viewing. Finally, the teacher can encourage parents to become involved with drama by having children participate in shadow plays or script plays. (HOD)

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Early Literacy: A Parent - Child Partnership

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Introduction

Learning can occur in a very natural way when a parent and a child team up and form a partnership. In this partnership, parents are the model for the young learner. They demonstrate how to learn, facilitate the learning process, and guide the learner. Parents establish a home environment which promotes and encourages learning. In this learning environment, the child becomes an active seeker of knowledge. S/he explores and discovers a wide range of concepts supported by the parent partner.

When teachers encourage, facilitate, and support the parent - child partnership, the benefits are numerous. With a teacher's guidance, parents develop a better understanding of their child and his/her learning. Due to this increased awareness, parents are better able to support their child's efforts in the learning process. As parents collaborate with teachers, their knowledge and comprehension of classroom practices expand. Familiarity with school practices leads to continuity in learning for the child as the home is able to support what the school does. Due to the increased interaction that occurs between home and school, the school develops a better understanding of the home environment and support for it increases as well. Essentially, a mutual respect develops between the home and school. They become a support team which ultimately benefits the child as demonstrated through growth in learning and achievement.

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The teacher's role in this early literacy partnership is imperative. It is important that teachers recognize the early literacy development of young children entering school. They have been emerging into literacy from birth as the home environment played the major role in modeling and reinforcing early learning. Young children develop an extensive oral language as they communicate both nonverbally and verbally with parents. Parents reinforce this communication with positive feedback. "Up da" gets an immediate response as dad quickly picks up the young child saying "You want daddy to pick you up."

Early states of writing evolve as children watch and mimic parents writing messages, letters, and grocery lists. Parents read stories and poems to children modeling reading as an enjoyable, learning experience. Children develop print awareness, background knowledge and a love of reading. This early learning that occurs in a naturalistic, risk - free environment prior to kindergarten is the basis for all further learning that takes place in school.

Strategies for teachers to share with parents

Read Aloud

Teachers can encourage parents to continue reading aloud to their children to provide new literacy experiences. A variety of books should be part of the repertoire as parents introduce, read, and talk about reading. Classroom libraries should include books that children check out and take home to share with parents. In addition, teachers can provide parents with suggested booklists to be used during trips to the public library or favorite bookstore.

Ideas for teachers to share with parents include:

1. Reading wordless picture books: Parents, including those with limited literacy skills, will successfully "read" and discuss the story with their child.
2. Reading predictable text: Books with rhythm and patterns of language allow young children to easily participate in reading. "Piggyback" stories can be developed as a follow up to the read aloud. As an example, children could write a piggyback story to "My Brown Bear Barney" by Dorothy Butler, that may be titled "My Black Dog, Rex." The story could read, "When I go shopping, I take my mother, my hat, my coat, and my black dog, Rex."
3. Reading poetry with children: Poetry is a wonderful way for parents to share the verse of language with young children. The rhythm of verse is easily mimicked by children during repeated readings.
4. Reading environmental print: As parents and children travel in the car or shop at the local supermarket, children can read and identify environmental print. Parents can identify signs, logos, and acronyms for numerous business and restaurants reinforcing the young child's familiar experiences.

Shared Writing Experience

Often the writing process is overlooked or not appreciated in the home environment. Classroom teachers need to make parents aware of the value of writing, support parents as they encourage their child's writing, and applaud the parent's efforts and successes.

Ideas for teachers to share with parents include:

1. Establishing writing areas in the home. Encourage parents to designate a space for their child to practice writing. The space may be at the kitchen

table, a desk, on a TV tray, using a lap board, etc. Materials such as paper, writing utensils, pictionaries, and dictionaries need to be provided. Storage may be a problem in some homes but a little creativity can solve it. A cardboard box becomes a mobile storage container. A shoe rack hung over the back of a door can house various materials in the different compartments.

2. Providing topics to stimulate writing in the home. Encourage parents to have children write and send postcards and/or letters. Thank you notes, an often forgotten form of written communication, are another way to promote writing. As parents make lists, their children can be composing similar lists. Notes to Mom's or Dad's are often a fun way to encourage writing in the home. Daily journals composed jointly by parents and children also promote writing.

3. Establishing an attitude which encourages writing. Parents should be encouraged to point out to their children when they are writing and how it is relevant to everyday life. Parents can request children to share their writing orally. By listening to what their children write, parents are demonstrating to children that they value writing.

Puppetry/Fingerplays/Songs/Oral Discussion

A child's oral language skills are the foundation on which other literacy skills are built. It is important that parents continue to encourage the development of oral language skills throughout childhood.

Ideas for teachers to share with parents include:

1. Using puppets. Classroom teachers can conduct a puppet making workshop for parents where parents construct puppets and practice using them to stimulate oral communication with their children. Teachers can also create puppet packets. Using large ziplock bags, teachers can include puppets and corresponding literature for students and parents to check out for use at home. Puppet packets are extremely successful when children have had experiences with them in the classroom already.

2. Sharing the words and motions to fingerplays, poems, and songs. Parents should encourage children to recite and sing but often times fail to do so because they don't know the words. Teachers can eliminate this problem by sharing the words to favorite fingerplays, poems, and songs. Audiotapes and/or videotapes can be made of the children reciting and singing. These tools provide visual and auditory references for parents.

3. Using the "Ask Your Child About . . ." newsletter. To stimulate a discussion about classroom events, classroom teachers and students can compose a special, weekly newsletter. Instead of providing all the information about weekly events for parents to read, only give an introduction and then write, "Ask you child about . . ." The interactive newsletter encourages communication between the parent and the child.

4. Promoting car communicating. Parents and children spend a lot of time traveling in the car. Discuss where you are going, how you will get there,

what you will do when you arrive, what you see along the way, and so on. Use the time well.

5. Encouraging limited television viewing. Classroom teachers need to help parents learn how to become better consumers of television. A workshop or pamphlet can be designed on selecting programs, shared viewing, and appropriate amounts of time for watching television.

Drama

Drama involves the "whole" child. Reading, speaking, listening, thinking, viewing, and movement are all a part of dramatic experiences. As young children "act out" stories and plays, a teacher can videotape the scenes to send home for family viewing. Parents and children talk and write in response to the viewing. A special journal may be sent home for the written response and returned to school to be shared with the class.

Ideas for teachers to share with parents include:

1. Having children participate in shadow plays. Using a white sheet as a curtain and a large flashlight as a light source behind the sheet, children can create and reenact stories using cardboard figures that represent characters. Children can also play various parts in the shadow play by placing themselves behind the curtain and in front of the light source.

2. Having children participate in script plays such as "Chicken Licken" or "The Three Bears." Individual children play the various characters including a narrator. The characters can be depicted by cardboard designs of the heads of the figures created by the children or teacher. As

children read or ad lib their parts, they hold up the cardboard figures. Again, teachers may videotape the script plays to be sent home for viewing.

Conclusion

Literacy needs to be promoted and celebrated. Young children need to be encouraged to listen, speak, read, and write. Encouragement needs to come from the home as well as school. Strategies have been suggested to assist teachers as they collaborate with parents. Numerous ideas may evolve from the ones given. Either way, the goal should be for literacy to develop in a natural, meaningful way as school and home experiences compliment each other. The ones who will benefit the most are young children.

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